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Report on post-tsunami actions undertaken by the World Tourism Organization

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

The Secretary-General hereby transmits to the Economic and Social Council the report of the World Tourism Organization following the tsunami of 26 December 2004 which tragically hit countries in the Indian Ocean whose major industry is tourism.

The World Tourism Organization organized two meetings in Phuket, Thailand, an Emergency Task Force meeting and an extraordinary emergency session of the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization, to assess the magnitude of the damage and to prepare an action plan commensurate with each destination's recovery needs. The Prime Minister of Thailand addressed the Executive Council session and the ministers of tourism of the affected countries actively participated in the discussions. The Emergency Task Force meeting, held on 31 January 2005, the day before the Executive Council session, was chaired by the Minister of Tourism of India. Following the deliberations, the Executive Council adopted the Phuket Plan of Action.

As provided under Article 7 of the Agreement between the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization (General Assembly resolution 58/232 of 23 December 2003, annex), the World Tourism Organization shall submit to the United Nations regular reports on its activities. Accordingly, the present report on the post-tsunami actions undertaken by the World Tourism Organization is submitted to the Economic and Social Council under item 5, entitled "Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance", of the provisional agenda for its substantive session of 2005.

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Report on post-tsunami actions undertaken by the World Tourism Organization

1. In the aftermath of the unprecedented natural disaster that had befallen a number of countries in the Indian Ocean, the World Tourism Organization, as a specialized agency of the United Nations, responded in a manner commensurate with the magnitude of the disaster and undertook a series of emergency actions as follows:

(a) On 29 December 2004, the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization decided to rally the support of the international tourism community by convening an emergency session of its Executive Council in order to assess the situation and its impact on tourism. Phuket, being the "tourism epicentre" of this tragedy, was chosen as the venue for this emergency meeting, upon the recommendation of the Government of Thailand. It was a symbolic gesture for the World Tourism Organization to meet at the destination that was most affected yet, for the most part, still operational;

(b) Second, the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization decided to immediately dispatch two high-level, internationally reputed experts to the four countries hardest hit by the tsunami, namely, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Maldives. These two special envoys of the World Tourism Organization, who conveyed the international community's messages of condolence and solidarity, succeeded in accomplishing their mission of assessing the extent of the impact of the tsunami disaster on the tourism destinations;

(c) Third, based on its experience in crisis management acquired following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the World Tourism Organization constituted an Emergency Task Force composed of senior tourism officials, industry leaders, high-level tourism experts, and representatives of regional and international institutions. The members of the Task Force who were called upon to assess the extraordinary situation prepared the draft of a global tourism recovery action plan;

(d) On 1 February 2005, in Phuket, Thailand, an emergency session of the Executive Council was held for the first time in the history of the World Tourism Organization. The Emergency Task Force submitted a draft action plan which was unanimously adopted by the Executive Council as the Phuket Action Plan. At this meeting, the World Tourism Organization brought together government representatives from 42 countries as well as industry leaders, and representatives of regional organizations and financial institutions;

(e) While the programmes of other international agencies and institutions focus on humanitarian needs and the reconstruction of infrastructure, the Phuket Action Plan concentrates on the human element in the recovery by focusing on the saving of tourism jobs, relaunching of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, training or retraining of the tourism workforce, repositioning of the tourism product to be more sustainable and less vulnerable and, most importantly, restoration of consumer confidence in the tourism destinations affected;

(f) The Phuket Action Plan has been divided into five operational areas:

(i) Marketing and communications;

(ii) Community relief;

(iii) Professional training;

(iv) Sustainable redevelopment;

(v) Risk management.

2. To implement the Phuket Action Plan, the World Tourism Organization, in collaboration with the international tourism community, has initiated a series of specific activities and actions including familiarization trips for the media and tour operators, communication campaigns, waiving of participation fees at international tourism fairs, assistance in channelling funds to small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, workshops on risk management and repositioning of tourism products.

3. Finally, the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization has decided to take advantage of the world's biggest travel fair — the forthcoming ITB Berlin — by convening the second meeting of its Emergency Task Force during the fair. The meeting will review the progress of the implementation of the Phuket Action Plan with a view to obtaining more international support and speeding up the recovery efforts of the affected destinations.

Madrid, February 2005